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## ABSTRACT

This paper outlines Martin Heidegger's argument that poetry is the germinating seed of linguistic life. It discusses his belief that language has its origins in the poetry of experience and his premise that society has lost sight of or has forgotten poetic origins, because of the forms of logic and grammar imposed on language by modern technological society. The paper: (1) introduces Heidegger's poetic-based theory of language to those who may not have been exposed to it in a systematic way; (2) focuses speech communication scholars on what may be most important to them in Heidegger's work; (3) poses some questions regarding the shortcomings of his theory; and (4) points the direction for the development of a Heideggerean theory of rhetoric. Twenty-three footnotes are included. (Author/SR)

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MARTIN HEIDEGGER AND THE POETIC FOUNDATIONS OF LANGUAGE

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## ABSTRACT

### MARTIN HEIDEGGER AND THE POETIC FOUNDATIONS OF LANGUAGE

Heidegger argues that poetry is the germinating seed of linguistic life. He believes (1) that language has its origins in the poetry of experience and (2) because of the forms of logic and grammar imposed on language by modern technological society we have lost sight of or have forgotten these poetic origins. This paper introduces Heidegger's poetic based theory of language to those who may not have been exposed to it in a systematic way; it focuses speech communication scholars on what may be most important to them in Heidegger's work; it poses some questions regarding the shortcomings of his theory; and it points the direction for the development of a Heideggerean theory of rhetoric.

### KEY WORDS

being  
poetry  
grammar  
thinking  
logic  
logos  
mythos  
physis

## MARTIN HEIDEGGER AND THE POETIC FOUNDATIONS OF LANGUAGE

Poetry is the germinating seed of linguistic life. Such is the view of Martin Heidegger. The basic idea about language and the problem of language advanced by Heidegger is fairly simple in its ultimates. He believes (1) that language has its origins in the poetry of experience and (2) because of the forms of logic and grammar imposed on language by modern technological society we have lost sight of or have forgotten these poetic origins of language. Heidegger thinks that language is no longer a reflection of the real-life speech process because it has been severed from the creative act of speaking. He expresses this notion by saying that language has lost hold of Being. This paper will expound Heidegger's historical account of how the rise of grammar and philosophy has disconnected language from Being and the real-life speech process. I hope to introduce Heidegger's poetic based theory of language to those who may not have been exposed to it in some systematic way, to focus speech communication scholars on what may be most important to them in Heidegger's work, to briefly pose some questions concerning the shortcomings of his theory, and to at least point the direction for the development of a Heideggerean theory of rhetoric.

Heidegger is not the first language theorist to charge that grammar and philosophy interfere with the natural creative or poetic functioning of language. Such a viewpoint represents a

fundamentally Romantic line of thought, of course, though Giambattista Vico's New Science (1744) is also a part of this tradition. The fathers of Franco-German Romanticism, Rousseau and Herder, both thought grammar and philosophy detracted from the poetic energy of language. Rousseau said, "The study of philosophy and the progress of reason, while having perfected grammar, deprive language of its vital passionate quality."<sup>1</sup> And Herder noted, "Since every grammar is only a philosophy of language and a method for its use, it follows that the more primordial a language is, the less grammar must there be in it."<sup>2</sup>

But even though the disparagement of grammar and philosophy is traceable to at least the beginning of the Romantic period, Heidegger carries this line of thought further and gives to it his own spin. His amplification of this view is given impetus perhaps by a sharper and more pervasive awareness in the twentieth century of the inadequacy of language to function as an instrument for viable speech. Working in a climate that senses a more urgent need to investigate language problems, Heidegger gives a more detailed account of how grammar and philosophy impinge on the natural functioning of language than is given by Rousseau and Herder in their essays on the origins of language.

My paper will suggest that Heidegger's theory of language gives us a more incisive instrument for separating the rhetorical strands of language from the poetic in part because of his analysis of the sources of language in poetry. So before any attempt can

be made to understand what Heidegger thinks about rhetoric, one must be clear on what he says about poetry. Heidegger is preoccupied with poetry, and it is the subject of his most expansive ruminations, particularly in his later works. Like his predecessors he considers poetry as the primordium of language. Poetry is the very language of language. Poetry is the essence of language and the empyrean to where the roots of language must be traced. "Language itself is poetry in the essential sense. . . . Poetry takes place in language because language preserves the original nature of poetry."<sup>3</sup> To understand language then means to understand this primal language of poetry.

Heidegger's approach to the study of language seems like a response to the approach that tends to praise facts, data, information, and other quasi-incorruptible units of knowledge. There is a general belief that the more of these units of knowledge that are present in a message the more reality it will have and the more effective it will be. Guided by this principle, some modern messages seem to be overstocked with facts, data, etc. to the point that even the most analytically sophisticated people and computers have difficulty handling them. When there subsequently occur "communication breakdowns" because of a frustrating welter of information, the nostrum usually offered is to serve up even more facts, data, etc. But anyone who has looked at language and communication with even a slightly wider angle of vision knows that the process is not necessarily enhanced by the glut of such

epistemic enervators. If anything, such approaches to the practice of communication have produced more confusion.

Heidegger thinks these communication problems develop at least in part because of an overly deferential attitude toward logic. While the widespread common sense notion seems to say that it is desirable to make one's communication as logical as possible, Heidegger suggests that communication can have an excess of logic. This giving in to logical thought leads to a deprecation of language and a general feeling of helplessness and ineffectiveness in the attempt to communicate. Moreover, the psychological problems and the general feeling of alienation experienced by Western twentieth-century human beings can be traced to the construing of language and practicing of communication in an excessively logical way. As Heidegger remarks, "Authentic speaking . . . dissolves if it is placed in the cheap acid of a merely logical intelligence."<sup>4</sup> Western languages no longer seem to be effective because their animating impulse has been chokingly corralled in the style of logic and technology. Considerations of this kind cause Heidegger to turn from an analytic approach to language to a poetical inquiry. To discover what modern Western languages are missing Heidegger examines the origins of language, particularly the genesis of philosophical language out of poetry.

The general exhaustion of modern Western languages is due to what Heidegger calls "the evaporation of being."<sup>5</sup> On first look "being" itself seems like an empty word--a word that refers

to at most some tenuous vapor, what Nietzsche called "the last cloudy streak of evaporating reality" (IM, 29). To understand being it may help to think of its opposite, non-being. Simply put, being is that which is without any qualifications while non-being is that which is not. Heidegger notes how "the word 'being' is indefinite in meaning and yet we understand it definitely" (IM, 66). His inquiry into language and his philosophy in general turn on his analysis of being. It is important to understand being because "The determination of the essence of language, the very inquiry into it, are regulated at all times by the prevailing preconception about the essence of being" (IM, 44). In the Heideggerean sense being is the soul of language.

Furthermore, since being reveals itself only through language, we are aware of being only insofar as we are aware of language as the "keeper of Being" or "the house of Being." Heidegger says:

Language is the precinct (templum), that is, the house of Being. The nature of language does not exhaust itself in signifying, nor is it merely something that has the character of sign or cipher. . . . All beings--objects of consciousness and things of the heart . . . all beings, each in its own way, are qua beings in the precinct of language (PLT, 132).

Language marks the boundaries of being, and so being can reveal itself only in language. If language loses hold of being, we have no alternative way of grasping or unconcealing being. Language then must give voice to being while being must have language. We



will see how the combination of language with being is the formula for authentic speech.

However, as Heidegger wants to show, being is no longer a part of modern Western languages because it has "evaporated." He traces this vaporization to the philosophy of Plato and, particularly, to the logic of Aristotle. The technology and modern industry that Heidegger objects to had its seeds sown, he believes, in these philosophies. The ancient world, with newly found tendencies toward form and order, reached a plateau of development in the logic of Aristotle. There are at least two major factors associated with the logic of Aristotle that Heidegger dwells on. The first has to do with changes in the relation between being and thought, the second with a change in the conception of truth.

In pre-Socratic philosophy being and thought had not been separated as they are under the reign of Aristotle's logic. With the pre-Socratics there was an awareness of being that allowed for being to be subsumed with thought in the oneness of language. This wholeness of language, conveyed in the pre-Socratics use of speech, was typified in their view of truth as alethia. Heidegger equates alethia with the awareness of or the revelation of being through speech. The very purpose of speech, as the pre-Socratics construed it, was to give voice to being through the process of "unconcealment." Through "the work of the word in poetry," being emerges from concealment (IM, 160).

Heidegger believes that language is formed in an interaction

of thinking with being. Thought becomes fused with being in the genuine speech act. But in Aristotle's logic (along with its heritage of modern philosophy and science) intellectual activity is emphasized to the exclusion of the experience of being. In the new logic what counted as truth changed from an unconcealment of being to a property contained in propositions. Additionally, the function of words began to center on the task of designation. This new epistemological procedure then worked to restrict truth to a function of intellectual activity and to preclude the experience of being. The law of excluded-middle in Aristotelian logic gave a true-false polarity to propositions. A true statement became one that corresponded with the facts while a false statement became one that lacked such correspondence.

In this polar logic the mold was cast for the modern philosophy of linguistic analysis with its concentration on thought to the exclusion of being and quantity to the exclusion of quality. The development of algorithms, artificial binary languages, calculation as practiced by computers--all trace their origins to this shift of truth from an unconcealment of being to a property of propositions. Even though Aristotle had posited a poetic and rhetoric, he did not seem to realize how his tool of logic would be used--probably in a way he did not intend--to distort his view of language. But of more immediate concern to Heidegger is that because of the two-valuedness of Aristotle's logic, language has lost hold of being. And the task of the individual as poet is now to push the way

through the excluded-middle of Aristotle's logic and restore language to its pristine power. Heidegger believes that only then will language be able to fulfill its essence as "the house of Being."

With this overview of Heidegger's argument as a starting point, I will now turn to a more detailed account of the linguistic and particularly the grammatical factors involved in the shift of truth from unconcealment to a property contained in propositions and as designation. These changes in the function of language are determined by changes in how language develops agreements with reality. Heidegger says, "The transformation of the sign from something that shows to something that designates has its roots in the change of the nature of truth."<sup>6</sup> Modern users of language, he complains, concentrate on designating objects instead of revealing being. To understand why "being" has become an empty word whose significance has faded, Heidegger thinks it is necessary to examine the etymology and the grammatical constructions associated with the word prior to Aristotle.

Bear in mind that a phenomenological concern with grammar--one such as Heidegger's--is not aimed primarily at examining the arrangements of words. Instead it is concerned with the psychological and ontological factors involved in the formation of these arrangements. Here, the modes of experiencing language and the way language mediates experience become more important than the logical relations of the elements within language. Indeed, the

way grammar is ordinarily construed is at the knot of the problem. One can look in a modern grammar book and find that the word "go" is the imperative of the present indicative "he goes" etc. But as Heidegger says:

These terms [imperative, present indicative etc.] ceased long ago to be anything more than technical instruments with the help of which we mechanically dissect language and set down rules. Precisely where a pristine feeling toward language still stirs, we sense the deadness of these grammatical forms, these mere mechanisms. Language and linguistics have been caught fast in these rigid forms as in a steel net (IM, 43-44).

Modern language users have forgotten that these grammatical forms do not exist immutably and that they do not exist independently of acts of speaking that produced them.

Heidegger maintains that with the pre-Socratics grammar was seen as something shaped by speech. But after the pre-Socratics grammar became something that shaped speech, and a part of the creativity of speaking then became hidden in grammar. To explain this ensconcing of the speech act in grammatical forms, Heidegger focuses attention on the process whereby these now ossified forms grew out of the Greek and Latin languages and were adopted by subsequent language traditions. The upshot, of course, is that the deadness of these forms has come to deny speakers a spontaneous and creative attitude toward language and has, thereby, inhibited.

the poetic process of unconcealment.

The investigations of modern linguistics, Heidegger notes, often ask whether the first words spoken by human beings were nouns or verbs.<sup>7</sup> But the very positing of this question, he says, involves a misdirection of language inquiry. The original character of speech is not to be found in a theory that gives primacy to nouns over verbs or vice versa. "This pseudo question first grew up in the light of a developed grammar, and not from a contemplation of the essence of language as it was before the grammarians ripped it apart" (IM, 47). This question arose as grammarians turned toward an analytical breaking down of the elements of speech, after they had made the mistaken assumption of considering speech as an already spoken language.

The distinction between noun (onoma) and verb (rhēma) was first described by the pre-Socratic Greeks. They made this distinction through observations about their own language. Heidegger notes that for the early Greeks there was an "inner bond between these two processes" (IM, 47). While contemporary speech involves the making of connections between nouns and verbs, the nature of this connection has changed from the original formulation of onoma and rhēma. So important is this change that Heidegger thinks we can explain the whole story of Western language and communication by analyzing these developments taking place during the generations beginning with the pre-Socratics and ending with Plato and Aristotle. He says:

The crucial differentiation of the fundamental forms of words (noun and verb) in the Greek form of onoma and rhēma was worked out and first established in close connection with the exegesis and interpretation of being, which was to exert a determining influence on the whole West (IM, 47).

Heidegger, of course, believes that while the early Greek formulation of onoma and rhēma was able to give voice to being later formulations were not. In contemporary grammar nouns are words for denoting persons, places, and things. But for the early Greeks onoma meant more than just the word that refers to an object. "Onoma meant the linguistic appellation in distinction to the named person or thing" (IM, 47). That is, onoma included the act of calling something by a name. This act became referred to as rhēma. "And rhēma in turn meant speech, discourse; rhētōr was the speaker, the orator" (IM, 47). For the early Greeks onoma was able to include a "revelation of things" (i.e. things in being) because it included rhēma, a "revelation of action" (IM, 48). By handling speech in this way, the early Greeks maintained an awareness of the ontological overlay of language and things that is formed in the act of speaking. Heidegger says "authentic" speech consists of "an interweaving" of onoma with rhēma (IM, 48). He depicts the early Greeks as vibrant communicators whose language was generated by creative acts of speech. For them to speak was to enter into a certain process of life where being was

unconcealed. And while the very practice of speaking seems to have embraced an ethic or theory of value, the notion of authenticity refers more exactly to a certain style of structuring thought and perception through speech.

But in contemporary speech the noun and verb do not have this authentic "interweaving" of language and things loomed by the act of speaking. To explain the relationship the noun and verb have evolved into, Heidegger directs our attention to two late additions to the grammatical analysis of language: the infinitive and substantive. The infinitive, as a form of verbal noun that performs the function of a noun, displays the features of a verb in not specifying a subject--e.g., "to eat," "to have," "to see," etc. The substantive is a form that portends existence and, of most significance here, expresses independent existence. Particular attention should be given to the substantive verb "to be." By carrying with it the notion of an independent existence, the substantive is a form that allows for the subduing of being in thought and, thereby, the making of ideas that stand in the place of being itself.

In making an ontological leap from things to ideas, the substantive marks the moment in language history when the activity of denotation became possible. With the development of the substantive, being became interpreted as an idea. That is, being became extirpated from experience and replaced by its shadow or designator in the intellect. What Heidegger seems to be doing is giving

Plato's shadow-on-the-wall-of-the-cave analogy in reverse--For Heidegger, the ontology of the substantive helped drag us in to the cave, not out. The development of the infinitive and later the substantive led to "the interpretation of being as idea" or "the evaporation of being" which Heidegger contends is the primary flaw of modern thinking and speaking (IM, 55 and 42). By virtue of the ontology presupposed in their use, infinitives and substantives brought a depoeticizing of language and thought.

More specifically the way Heidegger sees infinitives and substantives leading to the construction of being in the intellect is this: Unlike the onoma and rhēma of the early Greeks, what is named in the infinitive "is not invoked as really present but represented as only potentially in being" (IM, 54). The infinitives "to eat," "to have," etc. cause nothing to be seen. As an abstraction the infinitive represents no more than the word as a word. And, therefore, "The infinitive no longer manifests what the verb [rhema] otherwise reveals," i.e. the essent (IM, 56). With the infinitive the essent is no longer asserted in speech as it was in the "interweaving" of onoma with rhēma. "For the Greeks 'being' basically meant this standing presence" of the essent (IM, 50). By usurping the place of the essent, the infinitive gives being a different (i.e. intellectual) foundation. With the infinitive then speakers came to find the essent--as a copy of being--ready-made in speech.

The infinitive marks the grammarians' initial move away from



authentic discourse; the substantive exacerbates this movement. Heidegger notes, "The transformation of the infinitive into a verbal substantive further stabilizes as it were the emptiness that already resided in the infinitive" (IM, 57). Furthermore, the development of the infinitive and substantive lays down the foundation for an ontology of data, information, and facts that "speak for themselves." Because of the new ontological independence of the abstraction, language becomes "a visibility of things that are already-there," or a "map of the territory" where the map is taken to be more real than the territory itself.<sup>8</sup> Another aspect of the ontological independence of the abstraction is the speaker-less argument. The modern speaker is fond of telling listeners that "the facts ring loud and clear" or "the handwriting is on the wall." Such speakers use a rhetorical strategy that drives a wedge between themselves and their arguments. Among such communicators arguments must be seen as arguing themselves, independently of the speaker who presents them.<sup>9</sup> But while logic is usually considered as being independent of ontology, Heidegger insists we must see it as subject to ontology.

In reorienting language toward abstraction, the infinitive and substantive also laid the ontological foundation for the literal meaning, i.e., an apriori language form in which words (and the arguments built from them) appear to be beyond the control of the speaker. Though Heidegger does not explicitly express this important result of interpreting being as an idea, he should probably

examine this matter more closely. The literal meaning could develop only after the essent was found ready-made in speech. When using a literal meaning we speak as though language has its own essence. If spoken in the form of a literal meaning, language seems to vouch for its own legitimacy because it is according to its own letter, which is taken to be sufficient.

When being became transmuted into ideas, speaking became determined by an "unchosen" grammar and logic (and "unchosen" literal meanings). With language as "a visibility of things that are already-there," seeing (i.e, poetic seeing) degenerated. Heidegger says, "The eye, the vision, which originally projected the project into potency, becomes a mere looking over or gaping at. Vision has degenerated into mere optics" (IM, 52). In authentic seeing one does not appropriate a ready-made visibility; instead one is the means of constituting the visibility. But the new role of language in knowing has made the role of one who does such seeing superflous. With the new practice of collecting knowledge in the language of propositions, objects can be so well "known" in language that they are not well seen or do not need to be seen. Noting the results for language brought on by these changes, Heidegger asks: "Can it now surprise us that 'being' should be so empty a word when the very word form is based on an emptying and apparent stabilization of emptiness?" (IM, 57).

The development of the infinitive and substantive helped to form a new relationship for nouns and verbs--a new bridging function

that ruined the delicate "interweaving" that existed between the early Greek onoma and rhēma. Heidegger says, "Onoma and rhēma, which originally designated all speech, narrowed in meaning and became terms for the two main classes of words," nouns and verbs (IM, 47). The thinking associated with the infinitive and substantive gave a new abstract mode to the way speakers related nouns to verbs. Because language was now conceived of and practiced apart from being, emphasis fell on the "is," the intellectual or logical copula. Heidegger says, "Now 'being' itself becomes something that 'is,' though manifestly only essents are and not being in addition" (IM, 57). By making being identical with the 'is' of a proposition, the essence of a thing can have existence only when it has something extra, that is, the "being" conveyed by the "is" of the intellect. Heidegger thinks this simple error marks out the paradigm for how language has lost hold of the human reality. He stresses how the "is" of the proposition cannot give full expression to the human reality. By disconnecting being from its essent and placing it in the "is" of the proposition, being tends to evaporate or to be forgotten in the idea, thus diffusing the poetic quality of language.<sup>10</sup>

Heidegger says we come to understand the substantive "to be" through the "is." "'To be' is for us the infinitive of 'is'. And involuntarily, almost as though nothing else were possible, we explain the infinitive 'to be' to ourselves through the 'is'."<sup>11</sup> A Sartrean phenomenologist would probably say that the 'is' results when a speaker refuses to consciously choose. Unfortunately,

Heidegger does not offer much in the way of a detailed structure of consciousness and its relation to grammar or even language in general. Still, the change in the relation of subject to predicate brought on by the "is" marks a fundamental change in the psychology of cognitive functions and in reality or ontology. With this change language is not able to express what an object is but only what is thought about it. Perhaps the most important aim of Heidegger's theory of language is to drive home this point. He repeatedly brings up for discussion in different contexts the anti-poetic effects of this cognitive and ontological switch. By making being identical with the "is," being becomes interpreted as an idea. And when being becomes an idea, things become non-entities, no longer the standard for what is real. Here, again, being has evaporated or has been forgotten.

Heidegger says this thinking about language begun by the grammarians became exaggerated as logic. This tendency was carried forward by Aristotle with his reorientation of logos toward logic. The early Greek logos included the experiencing of being; Aristotle's logic did not. The new logic dissolved the union of thought with being and served to make thought into an independent realm. Thought as logic could not promote unconcealment, and instead it became the means of showing the truth or falsity within propositions. Aristotle's logic then further pushed experience out of language. His reinterpretation of logos "defines being on the basis of its own 'is,' the 'is' of statement" (IM, 168). In this way the "is" promotes a folding in or turning away from experience in contrast to

the unfolding or unconcealment of poetry.

Heidegger says Aristotle's reinterpretation of logos "was taken as a model in the subsequent development of logic and grammar" (IM, 48). By extending the effects brought on by infinitives and substantives, the "is," besides leading to a further dissolution of experience, canceled out the speaker's performance (rhēma) in speech. Individual words (as ideas) came to have an existence of their own through the quasi-ontological force of the "is." And with the further development of logic, the "is" was given new magnitudes through the "is not" of negation and the "is as" of simile. Heidegger's suggestion that it was grammar that made logic possible (rather than vice versa) of course runs counter to the analytic philosopher's conception of language. But truth and falsity (i.e. affirmation and negation as in "is" or "is not") could arise only after infinitives and substantives had given users of language a sufficient distance from things. Following these developments, logic began a life of its own anchored only to Aristotle's three laws (contradiction, identity, and excluded middle).<sup>12</sup>

Aristotle's laws have, in turn, exerted a profound effect on the further development of language. One pervasive example of their effect is the dichotomizing tendency that characterizes nearly all Western thinking and speaking. In these dichotomies terms are paired with their opposite extremes (clean-dirty, strong-weak, etc.). Carrying forward the direction of Heidegger's inquiry, we would question how the dichotomizing tendency leads to a drawing out of

shape or disruption in the flow of experience. Through such dichotomies language works to determine the experiences that are to penetrate our awareness. Because of Aristotle's logic, Westerners tend to construe predicates in an either/or way, incited by what Kierkegaard called "a passion for disjunction." By the law of excluded-middle, a subject X either "is" or "is not" A. The dichotomizing tendency gives rise to a set of fictive polarities (e.g. as in Freud's ambivalence) that do not reflect authentic human experience. In this way grammar and logic have brought on the crowding of experience within a smaller compass.

Furthermore, when language becomes infused with the quasi-ontological strength of the "is," the structure of language is always in danger of superseding and thereby becoming the structure of reality. Heidegger notes that in using language this way, "man transposes his propositional way of understanding things into the structure of the thing itself."<sup>13</sup> With this transposition language becomes apophantic fantasy instead of a means of exposing being. And Heidegger, again, considers the development of infinitives and substantives to be the key to this shift.

The results we have seen so far of Heidegger's critique of grammar suggest how the development of grammatical forms "has produced a blunted, indefinite meaning" in the experience of being (IM, 63). The reinterpretation of being as idea came as a result of changes in the practice of thinking--changes that manifested themselves in the development of grammar and logic. Language is con-

structed out of the interaction of thinking with being. Thinking constructs the "house of Being" (i.e. language) out of speech, and the relation of thinking to being determines whether speech is authentic. In contemporary thinking and speaking, being is frequently overlooked because of a redirection of ontology initiated by Plato and Aristotle. To understand the poor craftsmanship involved in thinking that leads to the interpretation of being as an idea and the poetic lethargy of a language that speaks by itself, Heidegger examines three important words and the role they played in the evolution of Greek language and thought. These are logos, mythos, and physis.

If logos were a part of modern English vocabularies, it would refer to what is logical, rational, or real, as opposed to what is illogical, unreal, or mythical. To the extent that logos would still be related to speech, it would be seen as the epistemic antidote to the incorrect or false statements of rhetoric. But Heidegger notes that the purpose of speech, as the early Greeks saw it, was not to secure merely logically true and correct statements. Its purpose was also to make something appear or to reveal the essence of being which is itself a part of appearance. In this way an object is lifted out of concealment through speech. In the act of speaking an object is lifted out of the darkness of indistinction and is illuminated by the light of rationality. But even though it is the logos that lights up the rationality of things, Heidegger stresses that it is not the logos that does the lifting

or aims the light of rationality. These latter functions are performed by the mythos. Because the mythos casts the beam of light made up of the logos, it is involved with the initial choice to speak of something. "Mythos is what has its essence in its telling," says Heidegger<sup>14</sup> The mythos, then, provides a necessary assistance to the phenomenon in completing its manifestation of itself. Heidegger thinks modern philosophers have confused the relationship of logos and mythos by trying to use logos against mythos. He explains:

The mythos is that appeal of foremost and radical concern to all human beings which makes man think of what appears, what is in being. Logos says the same; mythos and logos are not, as our current historians of philosophy claim, placed into opposition by philosophy as such; on the contrary, the early Greek thinkers (Parmenides, fragment 8) are precisely the ones to use mythos and logos in the same sense. Mythos and logos become separated and opposed only at the point where neither mythos nor logos can keep to its own nature. In Plato's work, this separation has already taken place. Historians and philologists, by virtue of a prejudice which modern rationalism adopted from Platonism, imagine that mythos was destroyed by logos (WT, 10).

In the hands of Plato logos became narrowed in meaning while mythos became equated with falseness. The mythos that had empowered



creative acts of speaking seemed to be no longer needed because language was now to be spoken through its own logic (or literal meaning).

The philosophy of Plato brought on a similar narrowing of physis. Parmenides and other pre-Socratics had sensed "the experience of being as physis," says Heidegger (IM, 50). The psychical, the animated--living in general--belong to physis. As Heidegger tells it:

Physis . . . denotes self-blossoming emergence (e.g. the blossoming of a rose), opening up, unfolding, that which manifests itself in such unfolding and preserves and endures in it; in short, the realm of things that emerge and linger on. . . . Physis means the power that emerges and the enduring realm under its sway. . . . physis is being itself, by virtue of which essents become and remain observable (IM, 11-12).

Physis is the force behind language as poetry. It originates in concealment and blossoms out in unconcealment (alethia) within the human reality of authentic speech.

At the hands of subsequent philosophers, though, there was a "narrowing of physis in the direction of physics," says Heidegger (IM, 13). Modern science approaches reality through the study of natural phenomena, but Heidegger reminds us that "physis. . . is not synonymous with these phenomena, which today we regard as part of 'nature'" (IM, 12). In the modern descendant of physis, the

physical, human beings are taken to be just passive observers. Physis, in contrast, is the emerging life force that makes human beings a part of the world. Physis does not convey the mathematization of the world that modern physics does. Heidegger says, "Physis . . . is the overpowering presence that is not yet mastered in thought" (IM, 51). Physis has not yet been mediated by symbols or ideas. From the standpoint of phenomenology, the differences between physis and physics might be summed up by noting that physis is pre-literal and radically empirical while physics is post-literal and radically abstract.

The original unity of being with thinking was reflected in the unity of physis with logos. As the early Greeks conceived of logos together with physis, truth was a matter of unconcealment achieved through the work of the word in poetry. Heidegger defines the early Greek logos as "the primal gathering principle" (IM, 108). Logos is the gathering together of being through perception. In contrast to modern logic, logos is a process that includes both thinking and perception. Some phenomenologists even define perception as "nascent logos."<sup>15</sup> Meanings and words themselves were not a part of logos, except in the secondary sense that these are partly a consequent of the gathering of logos. Heidegger notes that even though logic was developed in the schools of Plato and Aristotle and the pre-Socratic philosophers had no formally developed logic, these earlier philosophers were still not illogical. He suggests that logic is a tool for schoolteachers, not for

philosophers. The early logos tended to be more closely associated with apprehension than with the managing of relations among ideas (in terms of their consistency). This latter function came to be assumed by logic. The turning away of logos from apprehension or gathering to the regulating of ideas already apprehended or gathered marks the transformation of logos to logic.

Originally, the gathering of logos (along with the telling of mythos) had made the incidence of unconcealment. But with the above changes in logos, the essent is no longer realized as a part of being, since the essent is seen as what has already been gathered (or is already in the literal meaning). With the transition of the essent from being to what has already been gathered, the process of unconcealment gets left out of speech, as the essent is now found ready-made in the logos, which by now has become logic. Heidegger summarizes these developments and some of their consequences thus:

The essent is disclosed in the logos as gathering. This is first effected in language. Consequently the logos becomes the essential determinant of discourse. Language--what is uttered and said and can be said again--is the custodian of the disclosed essent. What has once been said can be repeated and passed on. The truth preserved in it spreads, and in the process the essent originally gathered and disclosed is not each time experienced for itself. In the transmission the truth detaches itself as it were from the

essent. This can go so far that the repetition becomes a mere babbling by rote, a glossa. Statement is always exposed to this danger (IM, 155).

The results of this evolution of logos and physis can be summarized by noting (1) that logos has been transformed into a propositional structure by having been put in the hands of logic and (2) that physis has been transformed from being to ideas, where it too is made to conform to the strict administrations of logic. At the center of both these transformations is the change in the nature of truth from unconcealment to correction of statement. Correlative to this domination of logic is the separation of thinking from being. The initial crack and subsequent yawning chasm between thinking and being is traceable to the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle, and this formulation of thinking and being has dominated Western philosophy down to the present. For these reasons Heidegger thinks the essential story of Western language development is to be found in the philosophy of the Greeks.

On the basis of Heidegger's analysis, we should also see that the most distinguishing mark of poetry may be that it captures the essent anew in each act of speaking. Poetry assumes a form of apprehension that will "so disclose the essent as to put it back in its being" (IM, 153). This strong feeling for the pristine experience of the essent has probably been sensed by every great poet, if not in an explicitly expressed theory then at least (more importantly) in actual practice. The proto-phenomenologist Goethe, for example,

gave this point explicit expression in his theory by stressing, "That my perception be not separated from things . . . that my perception itself be thinking, my thinking perception."<sup>16</sup> Thinking must coalesce with experience if it is to energize the poetic voice of unconcealment. In What is Called Thinking? Heidegger discusses the relation of thinking to poetry. As might be expected he does not equate thinking with logic. He even asks: "Why does the traditional doctrine of thinking bear the curious title 'logic'?" (WT, 113).

Authentic or poetic thinking is different from the kind of "thinking" involved in assessing the logical relationships among a collection of words or designators. This latter kind of "thinking" is carried out in conjunction with a misunderstanding of the nature of words. This kind of "thinking" does not give due regard to the fact that words do not have a content or have a relationship with each other that is independent of or prior to their use in speech. To counteract this mistaken notion of words, Heidegger suggests that we see words as "wellsprings":

Words are not terms, and thus are not like buckets and kegs from which we scoop a content that is there. Words are wellsprings that are found and dug up in the telling, wellsprings that must be found and dug up again and again, that easily cave in, but that at times also well up when least expected (WT, 130).

The kind of "thinking" associated with designation does not

acknowledge the evanescent character of words as "wellsprings." Instead of a "thinking" that concerns itself primarily with correctly coordinating words with objects or with assessing the logical relations among a collection of designators, Heidegger advocates a poetic thinking that centers in exposing the concealed. One of Heidegger's editors, J. Glenn Gray, notes that "Thinking is a concrete seeing and saying of the world" (WT, xii). With the interpretation of being as an idea, it is the concrete seeing and saying that gets lost. That which is to be thought about (i.e. being) has evaporated or been forgotten. And, therefore, since with logic there is nothing to be thought about there cannot be thinking. Rather than construing thinking as primarily a logical process, Heidegger considers thinking as a dwelling in being, and language is the means of this dwelling. Such thinking constructs language or the house of Being. Heidegger's view is that thinking is "a primal telling and speaking of language" (WT, 135). And articulated speech is "the echo of [this] thinking experience [with being]" (OWL, 72).

Heidegger likes to quote Parmenides' remark that "One should both say and think that Being is" (WT, 168, 171, 178). For Parmenides being served as the basis of thinking. Heidegger believes that the now lost unity of thinking and being enjoyed the most perspicuous livelihood in his work. And even though Plato considered himself to be a follower of Parmenides, he still was not in-

clined toward "a concrete seeing and saying of the world." In Plato's philosophy thinking became subjected to the autocratic laws of logic, and as Heidegger says, "We shall overrate and over-tax . . . thinking," so long as it is subject to primarily the demands of logic (WT, 159).

The interpretation of being as idea brought on "the transformation of logic into the question of the essential nature of language" (WT, 154). In What is Called Thinking? Heidegger explains the process of how logic came to function as the bedrock of language or as "the doctrine of the logos":

Logic, as the doctrine of the logos, considers thinking to be the assertion of something about something. According to logic, such speech is the basic characteristic of thinking. In order for such speech to be possible in the first place, the something about which something is said--the subject--and that which is said--the predicate--must be compatible in speech.<sup>17</sup>

That is, for objects of experience to be recognized as valid or real, they must first conform to the crucible of logic now in speech. With logic as the doctrine of the utterance, experiences that fit into Aristotle's logical forms become more easily and readily expressed. Speech that attempts to give expression to certain "illogical" experiences (e.g. ambivalence) becomes less tenable. And a whole range of experiences became lost to philosophers (or at least barely accessible) until the arrival of existen-

tialism.

When faced with the intellectual complexity of two ideas in opposition being equally viable (as in, for example, the dissoi logoi of the sophists), Aristotle and subsequent philosophers allowed thinking to submit to logic. Today's victims of this submission still believe that thinking is primarily a logical process. But Heidegger makes this observation about Aristotle's law of contradiction that in the context of these matters can not be overstressed: "Only because thinking is defined as logos, as an utterance, can the statement about contradiction perform its role as a law of thought" (WT, 155). That is, only after thinking is defined as a matter of relating subjects and predicates within propositions (as in the logos of statement) can the law of contradiction come to regulate thinking. While post-Aristotelean thinking and speaking proceeds on the mistaken assumption that we can have language only because we have logic, Heidegger stresses that we can have logic (as in the law of contradiction) only because we have language. We can have strict logic only when there is a misuse of thinking--a misuse of thinking that takes place through a misuse of language. Thinking, as a concrete seeing and saying, must precede the law of contradiction. There are no contradictions in being. They can arise only when language has lost hold of being by making ideas more important than experience.

Language then is the pivot in this process. Only through it can thinking shift from a concrete seeing and saying to the ideology



of logic and the law of contradiction. In this post-Aristotelean view of language, communication takes on a less imaginative and poetically moribund character. Speaking is no longer able to get involved with the unspoken. Essential for getting involved with the unspoken is noesis, which Heidegger translates as "a taking to heart."<sup>18</sup> Though this phrase may misleadingly give rise to sentimental connotations, "a taking to heart" for Heidegger simply means the poetic perception of something. And this kind of perception differs from the modern empiricist's perception as receptivity. While for these later empiricists perception is understood as a passive receiving of information, Heidegger says the early Greek taking to heart included "the spontaneity with which we assume this or that attitude toward what we perceive" (WT, 203). In a taking to heart we do not just let come what is before us. Instead: "We take it up specifically, and do something with it. . . . In receptive perception we remain passive, without the active attitude toward what is perceived. But such passive acceptance is precisely what noesis [a taking to heart] does not mean" (WT, 203). Later empiricists who were to center their investigations on perception as receptivity distorted the early Greek taking to heart, and in promulgating this distortion they undermined the spontaneity that had allowed the interaction of thinking with being.

Heidegger says that in present language use a taking to heart has been subsumed by legein, the making of statements. Though legein has been variously translated as to state, reflect, utter,

or report, Heidegger stresses that it does not mean to speak. He notes that legein (to state and reflect) is the verb of the noun logos (statement and reflection). Though what happens in thinking can not be fully explained by legein and logos alone, "We have been told often enough that logic, the theory of the logos and its legein, is the theory of thinking" (WT, 197). According to logic, "thinking develops in the legein [reflecting] of the logos [statement]" (WT, 168). Modern logicized thinking consists of the reflecting (legein) of the statement (logos) because of the distortion of a taking to heart (noesis), brought about by its subsumption in reflecting (legein). In modern logicized thinking, a taking to heart (noesis) becomes "kept within" and "unfolds out of legein" (WT, 211). Instead of a taking to heart then noesis becomes a pre-rationalized apprehension derived from a language already constructed out of the reflecting (legein) on statements (logos).

By subsuming noesis, legein transforms perception from a taking to heart to passive receptivity. The absence of spontaneity in noesis when it is no longer a taking to heart allows thinking to contract into a reflecting (legein) on statements (logos): The following is probably Heidegger's most succinct description of these matters:

Thinking becomes the legein of the logos in the sense of proposition. At the same time, thinking becomes the noesis in the sense of apprehension by reason. The two definitions

are coupled together, and so determine what is henceforth called thinking in the Western-European tradition. The coupling of legein and noesis, as proposition and as reason, are distilled into what the Romans call ratio. [Thus,] thinking appears as what is rational (WT, 210).

Because logic is made to precede language, thinking becomes a reflection of what is said rather than what is experienced. Heidegger says, "The original nature of legein and noesis disappears in ratio. As ratio assumes dominion, all relations are turned around" (WT, 210). Instead of thinking serving as a means of constituting the proposition, the proposition then becomes the means of constituting thinking.

Though Heidegger's philological arguments are more complex than the brief exposition given here, I have tried to cull out what may be most important to speech communication scholars. We have seen how philosopher-grammarians attempted to transform logos into logic by way of a conceptualization of language. But in the end this logical-conceptual approach disfigures language and prevents it from serving as the house of Being. Heidegger recognizes how some contemporary studies of language, by focusing on grammar and syntax, betray the bias of the logician. Most existentialist writings seem to imply that meaning is the basic problem of language, not grammar or syntax. But a study of grammar such as Heidegger's is necessary (even from an existentialist point of view) to call our attention to what went wrong and to point us in the right

direction. The interpretation of being as an idea is the basis of all philosophies of language not based in poetry, says Heidegger; and he claims the history of Western philosophy "is at bottom a sequence of variations on this theme" (WT, 242). He asserts that the poetic sense of experiencing needs to be reawakened in the twentieth century and that this should take place through a reconsideration of the Greek past. In order to reinvigorate language we need to realize it as the house of Being, for to see language in this way "touches upon the nature of language without doing it injury" (OWL, 227).

Some possible problems with Heidegger's language theory might include the criticisms of Jacques Derrida.<sup>19</sup> While Heidegger goes a long way to debunk the centuries of obfuscation inured by rationalist thought, Derrida suggests that Heidegger still ends up submitting to the logocentric myth. At bottom Heidegger is just like all other philosophers because of his pursuit of truth and its origins. So while Heidegger does some deconstructionist things, he is also and obviously a constructionist, too--as in his advocacy of a reconsideration of pre-Socratic philosophy and his physis based theory of language that suggests an inner bond between word and object. In fact, Heidegger is so obviously a constructionist that it is not clear why anyone (e.g. Desilet) would find it necessary to try to show that he is. But Heidegger's not being a pure deconstructionist should not be a sufficient reason to disregard his work. I would like to suggest that whatever the objections of

deconstructionists, the need to construct something is still a worthwhile impulse in philosophy, particularly when that impulse is coupled with the skepticism and penetrating analysis that Heidegger brings to his critique of language and logic.

Some other possible problems with Heidegger's language theory deserving mention here include his view of the relation of language to thought. Heidegger's view is that the structure of post-Aristotelian thought reflects the logical forms embedded in language. Among those who would disagree with Heidegger on this point is L. S. Vygotsky who maintained that "Thought and speech have different genetic roots," and "The two functions develop along different lines and independently of each other."<sup>20</sup> Language then may not really have the arm-twisting effect on thinking that Heidegger (and others) have suggested. Another problem with Heidegger's theory that is of more immediate concern has to do with his neglect of the social or rhetorical function of language. Jean-Paul Sartre inveighs against the early Heidegger's "being-with" for not effectively grasping social conflict: "Heidegger's being-with is not the clear and distinct position of an individual confronting another individual."<sup>21</sup> Instead of seeing human beings as individuals in conflict, Heidegger's vision is that of a crew of rowers, says Sartre. In the same vein Georg Lukacs criticizes Heidegger for conceiving of man as "an ahistorical being."<sup>22</sup> To the extent that Heidegger has a concept of the individual, he seems to see him/her as being in isolation rather than as a part of a social environment with its

various crosscurrents of linguistic influence.

Heidegger does not seem to give due regard to the fact that language is at least in part the product of people acting together. The hortatory function of language has at least something to do with our inclination to speak. Yet in Heidegger's theory language seems more like monologue than a social process of dialogue. To move his theory closer to completion we need to deal with questions such as the following: What are the social forces that cause something to be "unconcealed" in one way rather than another? A purely poetic language would be free of social or rhetorical constraints. (Again, a physis based theory of poetry seems to suppose an inherent bond between word and object.) However, can any speaker ever be completely unconstrained by the socio-cultural crucible in which he/she attempts to speak? If not, under what circumstances are speakers most and least constrained? And lastly, how can logic be used so as not to rob language of its poetic verve?

As Heidegger has stressed our presence in reality through language as poetry, Kenneth Burke has stressed a presence (of sorts) through rhetoric. Burke observes how images are related to poetry in the way that ideology is related to rhetoric.<sup>23</sup> Consider images here as fitting together loosely and not conflicting with each other. While poetic language aims at increasing our perceptions and perspectives on something through a flood of images, rhetorical language aims at decreasing or eliminating these through an imaginatively lethargic ideology. As poetry is the voice of the image, so

rhetoric is the voice of ideology. It can almost readily be inferred that in Heidegger's view rhetorical language would be the result of interpreting being as an idea. As Heidegger thinks of poetic language as the "house of Being," I would suggest that he would see rhetorical language as the "house of Ideology." Heidegger obviously prefers to live in the former house rather than the latter, but again he does not seem willing to accept that the latter, like it or not, is a part of the neighborhood, too. And instead of working with his neighbor he prefers to ignore him.

Perhaps because Heidegger does not see the necessity of including ideology in his language theory, he does not see the necessity of including rhetoric. But all activity in language, even that carrying out the basic dynamic of poetry, must include rhetoric. Northrop Frye probably speaks for many scholars when he says, "Anything which makes a functional use of words will always be involved in all the technical problems of words, including rhetorical problems" (AC, 331). In attempting to show how language might be freed of ideology, Heidegger is attempting to show how language might be freed of rhetoric. But, again, the essential question that must be put squarely before Heidegger is whether there can be an ideologically or rhetorically purified language. Does not the mere use of words (even prior to the development of infinitives, substantives, and the whole attitude toward language that these indicate) require conceptualization or idealization in some sense? Also, Heidegger needs to give more attention to the view that language develops

according to forms of social organization. Language presupposes society just as society presupposes language. In answering these above questions, speech communication scholars would be providing not so much a correction to Heidegger's theory as a completion.



## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Jean-Jaques Rousseau, "Essay on the Origin of Languages," On the Origin of Language (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1966), 68.

<sup>2</sup>Johann Gottfried Herder, "Essay on the Origin of Language," On the Origin of Language (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1966), 159.

<sup>3</sup>Martin Heidegger, Poetry, Language, Thought (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), 74 (hereafter cited as PLT). That the poetic origins of language is the governing theme of Heidegger's work is a point worth driving home is made evident by the publication of Gregory Desilet's "Heidegger and Derrida: The Conflict Between Hermeneutics and Deconstruction in the Context of Rhetorical and Communication Theory," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 77 (May 1991), 152-175. Desilet's essay may give a misleading emphasis in that it seems to portray Heidegger as making more of rhetoric than he actually does. The word rhetoric seldom appears in Heidegger's writings. But Desilet seems to rely heavily on secondary sources and the early Heidegger of Being and Time.

<sup>4</sup>Martin Heidegger, An Introduction to Metaphysics (New York: Anchor Books, 1961), 22 (hereafter cited as IM).

<sup>5</sup>IM, 42. Heidegger uses "Being" when he is talking about the being of being, the objectivity of the object, or things in the world. While Being is the original force behind nature, being is the realm of things marked out by authentic human thought. Some-

times being is considered as a metaphor for Being. See Ernesto Grassi's Heidegger and the Question of Renaissance Humanism: Four Studies (Binghamton, NY: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1983), 65-66.

<sup>6</sup>Martin Heidegger, On the Way to Language (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 115 (hereafter cited as OWL).

<sup>7</sup>Even the early Romantics, Herder and Vico, saw a need to answer this question. See Herder's "Essay" for an explanation of how nouns "grew" from verbs (132). See Vico's New Science (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970) for an explanation of how "nouns sprang up before verbs" (109).

<sup>8</sup>IM, 52. General Semanticists use this map/territory analogy for explaining the basic confusion that arises in the relation of language to reality. See S. I. Hayakawa's Language in Thought and Action (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc. 1978), 25-28.

<sup>9</sup>When we deny this separation of the argument from its speaker (as we perhaps should), we might find agreement more easily with Aristotle that ethos is the most powerful force of persuasion. Ironically, it was Aristotle's setting up logic as an independent field of study that perhaps undermined the notion that ethos was as powerful as he suggested.

<sup>10</sup>Only by mounting a poetic effort can speakers attain an undoing or breaking up of the "is." In Identity and Difference (New York: Harper and Row, 1969) Heidegger observes a "dissolution of the 'is' in the positing of the Will to Power with Nietzsche" (73). Asserting one's will to power dissolves the "is" and restores the poetic

vivacity of language.

<sup>11</sup>IM, 77. Though IM does not mention Alfred Korzybski's Science and Sanity: An Introduction to Non-Aristotelian Systems and General Semantics (Lancaster, PA: Science Press Printing Company, 1933), it is interesting to note that General Semanticists also object to the substantive verb "to be" because of its association with the "is" and the principle of identity. General Semanticists reject the verb "to be" because they believe the basic principle of life is change, not identity. But Heidegger would probably object to the General Semanticists' attempt to write in "E-prime" as a means of getting around the ontological tangle created by the verb "to be." Heidegger may have regarded "E-prime" as just another technologist's gimmick rather than as a real means of coping with the problem of language losing hold of reality. Whatever the merit of "E-prime" Heidegger certainly would have said that the language that recovers or unconceals being is more properly identified as poetry than as "E-prime."

<sup>12</sup>Heidegger, of course, is not the only theorist to put grammar before logic. On the relation of grammar to logic Northrop Frye, for instance, says: "Logic grows out of grammar, the unconscious or potential logic inherent in language, and we often find that the containing forms of conceptual thought are of grammatical origins, the stock example being the subject and predicate of Aristotelian logic." Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton: Princeton University

Press, 1957), 332 (hereafter cited as AC). Paralleling Heidegger even further, Frye goes on to say that even though logic grew out of grammar, it eventually outgrew grammar and developed a life of its own.

<sup>13</sup>PLT, 24. Kenneth Burke seems to be putting forward a similar conception of language when he says, "Instead of treating words (in ontological realism) as the signs of things, we would maintain (in linguistic realism) that 'Things Are the Signs of Words'." Language as Symbolic Action (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), 368.

<sup>14</sup>Martin Heidegger, What is Called Thinking? (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), 10 (hereafter cited as WT).

<sup>15</sup>James M. Edie, Speaking and Meaning: The Phenomenology of Language (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), 93.

<sup>16</sup>Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Goethe's World View (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1963), 69.

<sup>17</sup>WT, 155. The Greek characters Heidegger uses in WT have been transliterated into the characters used in English.

<sup>18</sup>WT, 203. As used in Plato's work (and as it might be commonly used in philosophy), noesis means existing or originating in the intellect. Heidegger's definition as "a taking to heart" departs from tradition.

<sup>19</sup>See Christopher Norris, Deconstruction: Theory and Practice (New York: Methuen, 1982), 68-70.

<sup>20</sup>L. S. Vygotsky, Thought and Language (New York: MIT Press and

John Wiley & Sons Inc., 1962), 41.

<sup>21</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, Being and Nothingness (New York: Washington Square Press, 1966), 332.

<sup>22</sup> Georg Lukacs, "The Ideology of Modernism," Marxism and Human Liberation (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1973), 281.

<sup>23</sup> Kenneth Burke, A Rhetoric of Motives (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 88.